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Monday, May 14, 2007

State & Regional - Wire

Posted on Sat, May. 12, 2007

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Analyst says late freeze killed 80 percent of Ky. strawberry crop

The Associated Press

LEDBETTER, KY. -- Delma

Miller managed to save

about 3,000 strawberry plants during a mid-April freeze and produced a plentiful yield.

By losing only one-fifth of his crop, Miller was the exception.

McCracken County Extension Agent Doug Wilson said most crops suffered badly in the late season freeze, with 80 percent of strawberry plants that were left unprotected destroyed.

"This was a 100-year weather event," Wilson said. "This is the first time this has occurred since they began keeping records."

Wilson said protecting crops such as strawberries from a late freeze can be difficult. Some farmers use straw and plastic, but that becomes a daunting task when several acres are involved, Wilson said.

Farmers typically remove the covers in the daytime, letting the plants warm up in the sunlight, and re-cover them at night.

Miller, whose fields are between the Ohio and Tennessee rivers, covered his fields with mesh and left it on for the duration.

"There's so much labor in putting it down that as long as it doesn't get too awful hot, it works better that way," he said.

Kentucky's strawberry crops are limited to a small number of commercial farmers these days, unlike the 1940s, when the state was considered the strawberry capital of the United States, Wilson said. The climate is considered good for the fruit, Wilson said.

"We generally have lots of rain, and your summers don't get too hot until July or August," Wilson said.

Information from: The Paducah Sun, <http://www.paducahsun.com>